

## THE CROSS AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE.

BY THE EDITOR.

### INTRODUCTORY.

CROSS means to us any form in which one line, stick, or beam, passes through or over another. The word is an Anglicised



THE SIMPLE CROSS.<sup>1</sup>



THE X CROSS.<sup>1</sup>

form of the Latin *crux*, which means any wooden pole or combination of poles erected for the execution of criminals. It is prob-

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Lipsius, *De Cruce*.

ably derived from the root “*çram*,” which in Sanscrit means “to cause pain” or “to torture;”<sup>1</sup> and the term *crux* actually retained the significance of any instrument of capital punishment in the form of a lingering and painful death almost to the time of Constantine, when Christianity became the state religion of Rome. Then two intersecting lines, either a horizontal on top of a vertical line (*T crux commissa*), or a vertical passing through a horizontal line (*+ or † crux immissa*), or two lines standing on end (*× crux decussata*) were adopted under the name of cross as the symbol of the new faith.



THE MOST COMMON FORM OF THE  
ROMAN CROSS.<sup>2</sup>

The *crux commissa* (*T*) is also called the Tau cross, because it resembles the Greek letter *T*, called *tau*. The equilateral *crux immissa* (*+*) is commonly known by the name “Greek cross,” while the other high form standing on a prolonged foot (*†*) is frequently called the Latin cross because it was officially adopted by the Roman Church as the symbol of Christianity. The popular name of the *crux decussata* is St. Andrew’s cross, because St. Andrew is supposed to have been crucified on the *X* cross.

Seneca speaks of the great variety of the forms of the cross and the various ways in which criminals were crucified.<sup>3</sup>

The cross, certainly, did not always have the transverse beam, and was frequently a simple pole, wherefore it has also been called “rood,” a word that signifies a rod without a transverse beam.

<sup>1</sup> The derivation from *crun-c*, as connected with the German *krumm*, proposed by Corsen upheld by Zestermann in his two programmes of Leipsic, 1867 and 1868, and again proposed by Friedrich (*Bonner Th. Litbl.*, 1875, No. 17 ff.), or a connexion with the root of the English words *crook*, as proposed in some English dictionaries, e. g., Chambers’s, are highly improbable, not to say, impossible.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced from Lipsius, *De Cruce*.

<sup>3</sup> Consol. ad. Marc. 20. Video istic cruces non unius quidem generis sed aliter ab aliis fabricatae, etc.

Cicero<sup>1</sup> dwells on the cruelty and ignominy of this penalty, which was reserved for the vilest crimes and to which slaves and highway robbers alone were subjected. Livy, whose idea of a cross is apparently that of a stake, calls the cross "arbor infelix," and Horace mentions the big timber nails (*clavos trabales*) and plugs (*cuneos*) employed for crucifixion.<sup>2</sup>

Pliny (*Hist. Nat.*, 28) alludes to the strange superstition, natural at the time and common all over the Roman empire, that the ropes or nails employed for crucifixion were regarded as possessed of magic power.

It will facilitate a comprehension of the history of the cross, if we distinguish between the cross as an instrument of capital punishment and as the figure of two intersecting lines. That the former gradually assumed the shape of the latter is an interesting and instructive fact, which will find its natural explanation when we consider that a simple religious symbol was needed for Christianity, and the figure of two intersecting lines recommended itself for this purpose on account of the universality of its use, the variety of its interpretations, and, finally, the religious awe accorded to it for its mystic potencies by almost every primitive nation on earth.

#### CRUCIFIXION AS A SACRIFICE.

The nature of punishments depends greatly upon climatic conditions, and the death penalty of the cross is of an unequivocally southern origin. It is an exposure to the heat of the sun. In fact, the word *ἡλιάξειν*, "to expose to the sun," is a synonym of the term "to hang up on the tree," or "to crucify."<sup>3</sup>

Death by exposure to the sun was intended among the Israelites as a sacrifice to Yahveh. We read in Numbers xxv. 3-5 and 9:

"And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor.

"And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand."

The most common death penalty of the Israelites is by stoning. Death by exposure to the sun always partakes of the nature of a sacrifice. We read in 2 Sam. xxi. 1-9:

"Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the Lord. And the Lord answered, It is for Saul, and for

<sup>1</sup> Cicero. Terr. v. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Hor., I., 35.

<sup>3</sup> The term *ἡλιάξειν* is the word used in the Septuagint in 2 Samuel, chapter xxi., verses 1-6 and 9.

his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites. And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah). Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the Lord? And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you. And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised gainst us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the Lord [i. e., Yahveh] in Gibeah of Saul, whom the Lord did choose. And the king said, I will give them.<sup>1</sup>

"And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the Lord [Yahveh]: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest."

The Gibeonites were worshippers of Yahveh as much as the Israelites, and yet they deemed it necessary to atone the wrath of God by human sacrifice. Without entering into the details of the story whether or not David intended to destroy thereby the house of his predecessor on the throne, we have the fact that the event took place in the name of Yahveh in response to an inquiry of Yahveh's oracle and according to the Yahvistic faith. It proves that the ideas of hanging up human victims to the Lord as an atonement were essential features of the religion of those days. But the Bible would not be a truthful record of the religious evolution of Israel if it did not preserve some evidence of this ancient and most significant custom, which was all but common among all savage nations.

It is a remarkable fact and by no means without significance that the oldest crucifixions recorded in the history of other nations, too, are not penalties but sacrifices offered to the sun-god, and these bloody offerings which seem to be interchangeable with holocausts were supposed to be the surest and most reliable methods of making prayer effective, of attaining one's wish, or of atoning the wrath of a god, especially if the victim was the son of the man who tried to gain the assistance of the deity.

Stockbauer, a Roman Catholic author,<sup>2</sup> calls attention to an event mentioned by Justinus which is of interest in this connexion.

<sup>1</sup> The clause בְּיָהוִיָּה, יְהוִיָּה translated in the English Bible, "whom the Lord did choose," would more correctly be translated "for the satisfaction of Yahveh." The author apparently does not mean to remind the reader in this connexion that "Saul was once the choice of Yahveh," but on the contrary, that a sacrifice of seven men of the house of the rejected King would appease the wrath of Yahveh. The verb בָּחַר means "delectari" or "to be pleased with."

<sup>2</sup> *Kunstgesch. d. Kr.*, p. 3.

The Carthaginian general Maleus had lost a battle about 600 B.C. in Sicily, and was on this account banished. Unwilling to submit, he returned home with his army and besieged his native city; but before he deemed it advisable to take the walls by storm, he had his son Catalo crucified in sight of the beleaguered fortifications, whereupon he attacked and conquered Carthage.

Notice here that the crucifixion of a son, an innocent victim, is supposed to be a reliable method of gaining the assistance of Baal!

The outstretched arms appear to have become a significant attitude of the sun-god. A votive stone, discovered in Numidia, North Africa, in the year 1813, shows the sun-god with outstretched arms holding a twig in each hand, with the inscription: "To Lord Baal, the Eternal Solar King, who has listened to the prayers of Hicembal," etc.<sup>1</sup>

Holocausts or burnt offerings in which the victim was burned entirely are another ancient sacrifice to the sun-god. The Baal cult mentioned in the Old Testament required of its devotees to make their children pass through the fire.

Holocausts, too, were made for sacrifices, and the superstition prevailed that if a man offered his own son, his prayer would surely be granted. We read, for instance, in 2 Kings, iii. 26-27:

"And when the king of Moab saw that the battle was too sore for him, he took with him seven hundred men that drew swords, to break through even unto the king of Edom: but they could not.

"Then he took his eldest son that should have reigned in his stead, and offered him for a burnt offering upon the wall. And there came a great indignation over<sup>2</sup> Israel: and they departed from him, and returned to their own land."

The Israelites are apparently convinced that it would be useless now to continue the war, for Baal must now grant the prayer of the King of Moab. They are indignant because they have been deprived of the satisfaction of making their victory complete.

The Greek author Manetho informs us that the Egyptian king Amaris stopped a solar sacrifice of three human beings and ordered that it be replaced by a holocaust of three wax figures.

The early Christians were conscious of the similarity of their own interpretation of the death of Christ and the solar sacrifices of previous centuries. In his answer to Celsius, Origen calls Christ a holocaust of Love, and Christianity has always been regarded

<sup>1</sup> Domino Baali Solario requaeterno qui exundivit precer Hicembalis, etc. The inscription is published in Ghillany's *Menschenopfer der Hebräer*, p. 531.

<sup>2</sup> The English version reads "there was great indignation against Israel." Luther translates more properly: "Da ward Israel sehr zornig."



as a final fulfilment of the ancient belief that a human sacrifice is needed for the atonement of the wrath of God.

### THE PRE-CHRISTIAN CROSS IN THE OLD WORLD.

We are so accustomed to regard the cross as the symbol of Christianity that we are apt to discredit the belief that the cross is the most common religious symbol of non-Christian, and especially of pre-Christian religions. But the fact is nevertheless well established, and can easily be proved.

### ASSYRIA.

On the monuments of Assyria and Egypt crosses of various description are found, among which the equilateral forms abound, (thus  $\dagger$   $\oplus$   $\otimes$ ). Assyrian kings wear equilateral crosses together with other amulets on their breast, and their horses are decked



ASSYRIAN KING IN BATTLE.<sup>1</sup>

with them. We are probably right in interpreting it as a symbol of the sun and royal dignity. Sometimes the solar wheel ( $\oplus$  or  $\otimes$ ) is used as an ornament for the ear, and we see the winged figure of a god placed within the four-spoked sun wheel.<sup>2</sup>

Upon a stele of Khorsabad an eagle-headed man holds in his right hand a ring, in his left a tau-cross ( $\tau$ ).<sup>3</sup>

Ancient crosses of the most modern description (thus  $\oplus$ , not unlike European decorations given by kings to men whom they desire to honor) are found among the bas-reliefs of Assyrian monuments, one of them depicting a royal reception scene. The cross

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Layard's *Monuments of Nineveh*.

<sup>2</sup> Layard, *Nineveh*. Figs. 79, a, 6, 11-59.

<sup>3</sup> Botta, *Monuments de Ninivé*, II., pl. 158. Layard, Fig. 23. Reihm, Fig. B, p. 114. Quoted by Zöckler, p. 12.

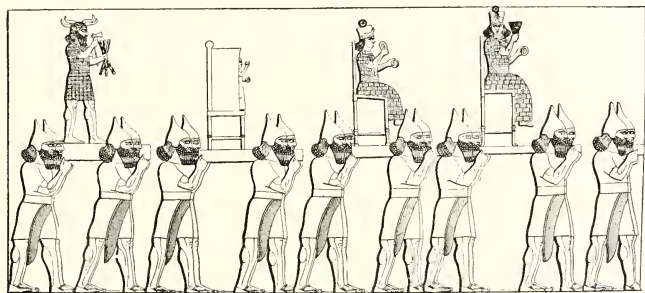
stands in the sky together with sun and moon, forming with these two divine symbols a trinity of remarkable significance.



A COURT RECEPTION IN ASSYRIA.<sup>1</sup>

[Note the cross, the sun, and the moon in the sky. Observe also the crossed hands of those who approach the king.]

The Assyrian thunderbolt which is seen in the hands of Marduk, the God of Lightning, exhibits the form of three crossing rods, almost like a star (thus ✕), and anticipating by a strange co-



PROCESSION OF THE GODS. Marduk (or Merodach) holds in his left hand the fagot-shaped thunderbolt. (After Layard.)

incidence the Christian symbol of the initials I and X, in the sense of Jesus Christ (✕), which is frequently found in the catacombs.

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Layard's *Monuments of Nineveh*.

A more complicated form of the cross, with flower-like excrescences and ending in a divided disk ( $\oplus$ ), is found in the hands of the goddess Ishtar, but its significance is still an unsolved problem.

The cross standing on a sphere ( $\otimes$ ), exactly the same as the



ISHTAR.<sup>1</sup>



PART OF THE SEAL OF AN  
EGYPTIAN KING FOUND  
IN ASSYRIA.<sup>1</sup>

emblem of royal power in Christian lands, appears on an ancient cartouche discovered in Assyria, which served an Egyptian king as a seal.

#### EGYPT.

Concerning the four-armed cross in Egypt, we quote from Alviella's book on the *Migration of Symbols*, p. 15, the following interesting remark:







"On the Famous Damietta stone the Greek words Πτολεμαῖος Σωτήρ, "Ptolemy the Saviour," are rendered by the demotic characters forming the equivalent of Πτολεμαῖος, followed by the sign  $\dagger$ ; from which the author concludes that the term Saviour being rendered by a cross, this sign was with the Egyptians, an allusion to the future coming of the Redeemer. Unhappily for this ingenious interpretation, M. de Harlez, who has taken the trouble to refute M. Ansault's article, points out to him that in demotic the sign  $\dagger$  is the simplest form of a hieroglyph representing a hammer, or a boring tool, and is usually employed to express the idea of grinding, avenging, and by amplification, "the Grinder," "the Avenger," a not uncommon epithet of Horus, and some other gods."






"The tau-cross," (i. e., T) says Zoeckler,<sup>2</sup> "has been found in Egypt upon the breast of a mummy preserved in the British museum, and is in several instances represented as growing out of

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Layard's *Monuments*.




<sup>2</sup> *Kreuz Christi*, p. 9.



the heart of a man" (thus ) . Other Egyptian symbols that resemble the Christian cross are such characters as *am* ( or ) , *un* () , the determinative sign of towns (thus ) . In addition, there is the cross with four transverse bars () which serves as a symbol of the Nile-measure, a staff with four cross-beams called *Νειλομέτριον* or *Νειλοσκοπεῖον*. This Nile-measure was regarded with religious awe, and the four bars were interpreted to mean the fourfoldness of the world and of the gods, and the four stages of the soul-migration.<sup>1</sup>

In Egypt as well as in Assyria we meet with a peculiar combination of the tau cross with a ring (thus  or ) , now commonly called *crux ansata* or handle-cross. Its form dates back to the most ancient times and is interpreted by the Egyptians as the key of life. The origin of the symbol can, as is the case with all pre-historic signs, not be determined with any degree of certainty. Some give it a phallic significance in which the upper or oval part  represents the female, and the tau-like T or lower part the male principle. Others surmise that it is the tau-cross upon which the solar disk rests. It is an attribute of Osiris and Isis and other gods of Egypt, as well as of the Assyrian goddess Ishtar. The key of life is more common with an enlarged circle outside of Egypt, where it becomes the emblem of Aphrodite or Venus  and is as such called the mirror of Venus. This sign is still retained in the symbolism of the science of to-day as an abbreviation which in our calendar means "the planet of Venus" and "Friday," i. e., the day of Venus, and in our botanical text-books "female," as opposed to the sign of Mars  as male.

#### THE CROSS OF THE ISRAELITES.

There is a distinction between *tau* and *tav*; the former is the name of the Greek T and its figure is three-armed () , and the latter is the name of the Hebrew *Th*, now written ) , which in its oldest form is a four-armed or Greek cross () ; but both are called crosses in the literature of early Christianity.

The Hebrew *tav*-cross may have been freely used as a sign, perhaps for marking cattle, and otherwise, but in addition, appears to have been equivalent to an oath when the signer attached it to a protocol or contract in the presence of a judge. Thus Job says (in xxxi. 35, a passage that is greatly obscured in our English Bible by a poor translation):

<sup>1</sup> See H. Brugsch, *Hieroglyphische Grammatik*, Leipsic, 1872. Concerning the Nile-measure see also Carrière, *Die Kunst im Zusammenhang der Kulturentwicklung*, I., p. 199.

"Lo, there is my mark [viz., my *tav* (+), serving as my signature or sigil]! The Almighty may reply and my adversary should write down his charge."

The meaning of these words is that Job has pleaded his case and has signed the document in a legal form with his cross, which act is equivalent to making a statement upon oath in court. He calls upon God to be his witness and wants now his accuser to make his charges which he is ready to refute. Another significant passage occurs in Ezekiel ix. 4-6, where we read:

"And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a [tav-]mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. And to the others he said in mine hearing, Go ye after him through the city, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have ye pity: Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the [tav-]mark; and begin at my sanctuary. Then they began at the ancient men which were before the house."

We must incidentally notice that this *tav*-mark of two intersecting lines (or, as we now would say, "cross") is never identi-



ASTAROTH WITH THE CROSS. Sidonian coins.<sup>1</sup>

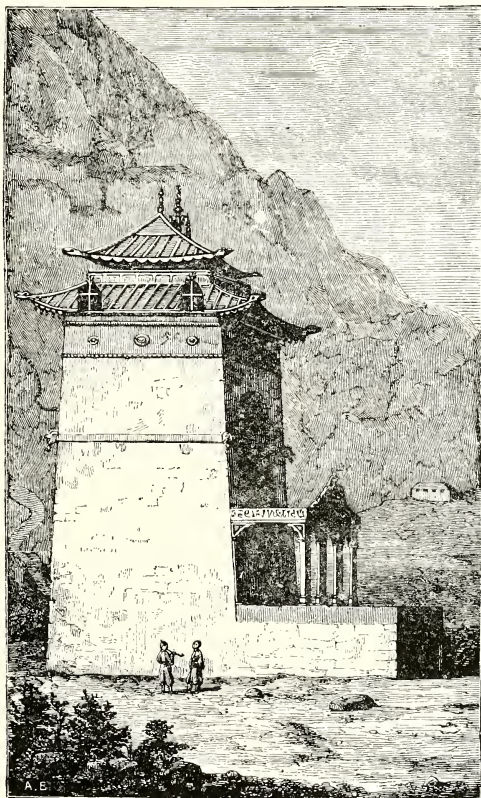
fied in the ancient Hebrew literature with the martyr instrument for crucifixion, which in Hebrew is simply called יָצ (pronounce 'ayts), a tree. The Israelites never thought of identifying both, and only in Christian times the *tav*-sign of Ezekiel could be interpreted as a prophecy of Christ. The passage proves, however, the prevalence of the belief in the salutary effect of the *tav*-mark and contributed not a little finally to settle the problem of the form of the Christian cross in favor of the figure of two intersecting lines.

#### PHœNICIA.

The high cross with a prolonged lower limb (thus †), is the symbol of Astarte in the ancient religion of the Phœnician sun-worship. Ancient coins of the city of Sidon show the goddess standing on the prow of a ship with this high cross in her arms. Considering the rite of a sacrificial crucifixion in the Baal cult of the

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Calmet No. 6, Plates CXL and XVL.

Phœnicians and Carthaginians, which is well established, we may here be confronted with an ancient identification of the intersecting lines with a pagan emblem of an atonement for sin.



MAUSOLEUM OF A GRAND LAMA IN TIBET.

#### INDIA AND TIBET.

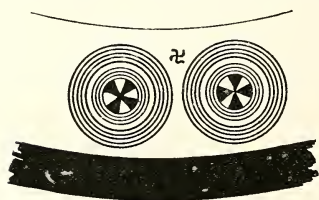
The sacred symbol of all the religions of India is an equilateral cross whose ends are turned all in the same direction at right angles, thus 卐 or 卐. It is called the Swastika or Buddhist cross,

but antedates the age of Buddha and can be traced to prehistoric times. It is called by Buddhists the wheel of the law and the broken lines are supposed to indicate the motion of the spokes.

We only mention, without entering into details, the use of the cross by the side of the swastika in Tibet and China, because they have probably been imported by Buddhists and Nestorians.<sup>1</sup> But there are good reasons to believe that crosses were used in pre-Christian and even in pre-Buddhistic times. Bishop Faurie, a Roman missionary and a Frenchman, observes (as quoted by Zoeckler, p. 20) that some tribes of Kui-Tchen, a province of Southern China, offer sacrifices to big crosses erected at the entrance of their villages. The people of this region of China, the bishop says, wear crosses of various colors on their garments and mark the dead on their foreheads with crosses of ashes. They call the cross "the great arch ancestor, saviour, and protector," which is apparently not due to Buddhist influence. Bishop Faurie jumps at the conclusion of a mysterious Christian tradition, which, however, we need scarcely add, is very doubtful.

#### GREECE.

The cross is frequently found in Greece, where it appears to have served mere ornamental purposes, for it abounds on pottery



THE CROSS AND THE SWASTIKA ON GREEK POTTERY. (Cypriot ware of the Geometric Period.)<sup>2</sup>

during the so-called geometric period. The swastika (卐), which may have migrated to Greece from India, is also quite common and received, from the similarity of its four arms to the Greek letter gamma (Γ), the name *gammadion*, or *crux gammata*. The *gammadion* appears on the pottery of Troy, on old coins, and on the breast of Apollo, the God of the Sun.

The swastika in all probability is a symbol of the sun. The original form (which most likely was not limited to four rays, but had sometimes only three, sometimes five or more) may have been undulating lines (thus ㄣ 卐 卐), forms which are still preserved on

<sup>1</sup> We reproduce on the preceding page the picture of a mausoleum from Huc's *Travels in Tartary, Tibet, and China*. (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Co.) The crosses on the miters which decorate monuments of this kind in Tibet are very conspicuous.

<sup>2</sup> *American Jour. of Arch.*, 1897, I. 3, p. 258.

various ancient monuments. When cut in wood by primitive artists, they may easily have assumed a cornered shape (thus ☸). That the idea of motion is connected with the swastika appears from the Buddhist interpretation of it as a wheel and from the feet into which Greek artists changed the gammadion, especially in its tri-cornered form.



APOLLO WITH THE SWASTIKA. (From a vase in the Historical Art Museum in Vienna.)<sup>1</sup>

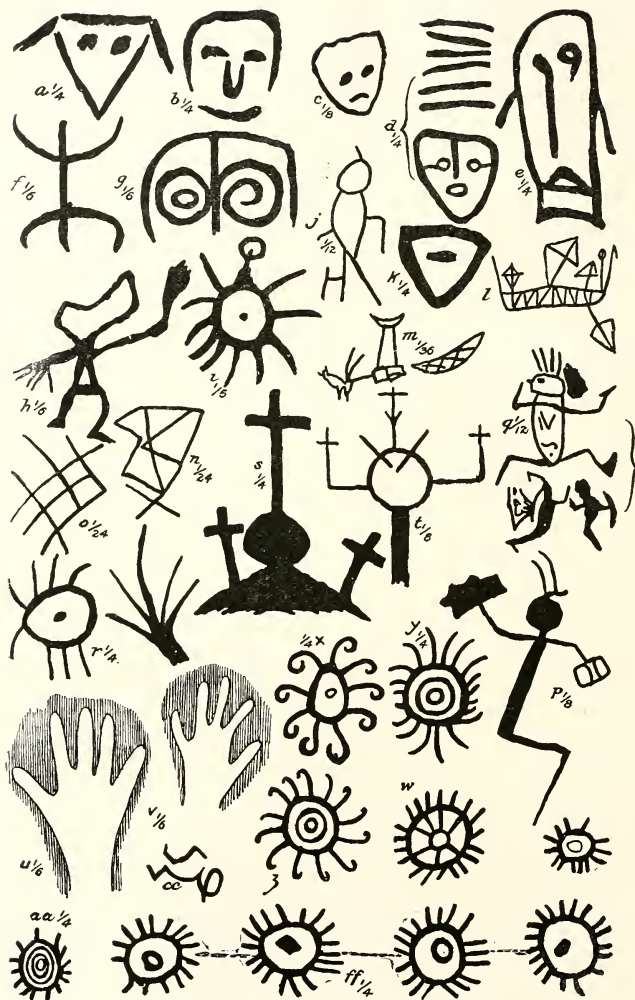
#### ROME.

Zoeckler<sup>2</sup> states that the pre-Christian use of the four-armed cross in ancient Roman monuments has been established by de Rossi, Edmond le Blant, and Marini, who discovered the use of crosses of this form (✚) in unequivocally pagan tombstones at the beginning and the end of the names. Zoeckler mentions several instances of the cross indicating the beginning and the end of names on coins as well as sigils, and calls attention to the method of

<sup>1</sup> Title page of D'Alviella's *Migration of Symbols*.

<sup>2</sup> *Das Kreuz Christi*, p. 397.

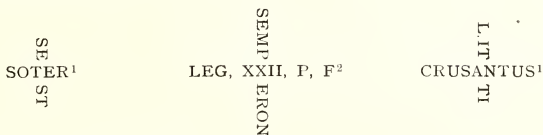




PETROGLYPHS IN KEI ISLAND, OCEANIA.



writing names crosswise, as did, for instance, the brick manufacturer Sempronius Heron, who made bricks for the barracks of the twenty-second legion.



Half a century before the Christian era a man working in the mint for Julius Cæsar wrote his name in the form of a cross; and Garrucci<sup>3</sup> declares that it indicates the Julian star (\* *Julium sidus*) which is frequently depicted as a mere cross (+).

#### THE TEUTONS.

The tau-cross (T) was an important religious symbol among the Teutons, who called it the Hammer of Thor, representing the thunderbolt of the God of Lightning. Thor was the first-born son of Odhin, the All-father, being, as a hero and a saviour, the favorite God of the Saxons as well as the Norse.

#### CROSSES IN THE OCEANIC ISLANDS.

In the religion of the inhabitants of the Kei islands the ghosts of the dead play an important part. There are a number of ghost caves, and the petroglyphs on overhanging rocks are the methods by which the natives remain in communion with their ancestors. Popular legend ascribes the greatest age to the petroglyphs *a-t* in the accompanying illustration. Most of them (*a-h*, also *q* and *p*) are masks and are probably intended to picture the ghosts. Figure *l* is apparently a ship. The hairy circles have either the same significance or may be solar disks. Other pictures are spirit hands (*u*, *v*, and *r*); but of special interest are two groups of three crosses (*s* and *t*) which might be an awkward reproduction of Golgotha if the theory of Christian influence were admissible. The greatest probability is that the pictures are intended to represent ghosts carrying three crosses, one on their head and one on each shoulder, or in each arm.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Camurrini *Iscrizioni di vasi fittili*, p. 18, No. 33, and p. 58, No. 361.

<sup>2</sup> P. F. means *primigenia fidelis*.

<sup>3</sup> *Revue Archéologique* 1866, I., p. 90.

<sup>4</sup> For further details see *Tenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Ethnology*, '88-89, p. 167-168.